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ABSTRACT

Proposing an educational maxim that education is for self-fulfillment and societal adaptation, the paper argues that the educational methods or teaching strategies of "learning self-fulfillment" must be different. The curriculum must be rational and flexible, exposing a child to as many things as possible to facilitate self-fulfillment. Further, the morality of a given society is reflected by the vocational opportunities which in turn are determined by the interplay between societal values as a whole and educational institutions as a group. Real education takes place when the individual-societal conflict is better resolved in the direction of a society serving more people well. The paper concludes with the idea that initial real education will accelerate a spiral toward a more utopian society. (TRS)

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# A Concise Educational Proposal

# For A Workable Late 20th Century Society

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ABSTRACT

The proposal offered is set within the framework of an educational maxim: Education is for self-fulfillment and social adaptation. Curriculum must be rational and flexible. The interplay between the values of society as a whole and educational institutions as a group is believed to determine vocational opportunities. These opportunities reflect the morality of a given society. Also, when individual-societal conflict is better resolved in the direction of society serving more people well, "real education" will take place. Finally, initial real education will accelerate a spiral toward a more utopian society.

A Concise Educational Proposal

For A Workable Late 20th Century Society

The proposal presented here is really an educational maxim propounding that education is for self-fulfillment and social adaptation. This maxim recognizes that tension does in fact exist "between the ideas of teaching as helping and education as individual edification & teaching as directed dialogue and education as social reconstruction."[1] I wanted to incorporate this sort of conflict within my maxim to indicate that education is problematic in terms of its aims, and that these aims can be very much at odds with each other. Rousseau pointed out the conflict well in his writing; and even used the extreme example of keeping his fictitious singular tutee, Emile, isolated from virtually all other people during the early years of his education so that he would not be corrupted by his society. Rousseau wrote; "...one must choose between making a man or a citizen, for one cannot make both at the same time".[2]

The word "is" rather than should is used in my maxim to indicate what "real education" in my opinion actually contains. Had the word 'should' been used it might have been misconstrued to be a mild suggestion on my part, rather than the strong position I am actually taking. Now that I have committed myself to this particular position, I shall proceed to explain it.

Self-fulfillment means to bring into actuality, as much as possible, what an individual person is capable of learning or wanting to learn. This is somewhat vague, open-ended, and arbitrary; but different persons have different

limitations. All reasonable people readily admit that different persons have different intellect, ability, and talent. From this grouping, let us deal with the topic of intellect. I believe that it has been fairly well established that most people have about the same average level of intelligence, but that a few fall at the high or low extremes. Those at the lower end of the intelligence continuum cannot be expected to produce much from a creative standpoint or cannot be relied upon for being responsible for the safety of others to any great degree at all. Those at the upper extreme can be viewed as being the opposite. The point of all this is that the means to the end of a "learning self-fulfillment" must be different. Educational methods or teaching strategies would have to be different. For retardates, much repetition and a concrete approach is necessary. For the gifted, one trial learning can be expected routinely and abstract concepts should be utilized to facilitate this learning. Yet with most people today, opportunity and motivation determine learning self-fulfillment. Let us now address the issue of desire. A few certain children do not learn to read at all while others learn to read later or just do not want to get involved with serious reading until they are adults, if ever. Many reasons have been given for this from cultural deprivation (usually meaning they come from poor homes) to those of neurological genesis (usually that mysterious notion of dyslexia). I believe that this apparent inability to read is in many cases more an act of volition[3] and that these children have chosen, consciously or not, to limit their own learning self-fulfillment but are probably unaware of the consequences. Finally, interests must be explored. Here is my maxim within a maxim: Expose the child to as

many things as possible so that self-fulfillment can be facilitated. The topic of interests leads us to the possibility of career choices as well as the second part of the primary maxim, social adaptation. However, before moving on to adaptation, some very important tangential issues will be discussed.

Throughout, the word learning has been associated with the notion of self-fulfillment, and not teaching except when used with strategies. Teaching is viewed here as a method to assist the student to learn, and there are many methods. The subject matter and the student's intellect plus motivation determine what is best. Resources also play an important part in terms of the experiences, settings, quality of materials and even teachers. This is where opportunity is a most important variable to the quality of the education. Finally, and perhaps the most important tangential variable of all, the curriculum. The material selected, by whom, and for what purposes are paramount. If the curricular materials are selected by highly intelligent-acting persons who are learning-wise self-fulfilled for the purpose of the self-fulfillment of students to produce a just society - regardless of the resources available - it can be expected that children would be able to receive a 'real education'. It is expected that this sort of real education would populate and perpetuate a moral society.

The aim of real education is to produce a society where all basic needs can be easily satisfied, where interpersonal conflicts are at a minimum because of a self-fulfilled population, and where the use of violence is not glorified. Adaptation to this sort of society - albeit utopian but not impossible in the future - would be made easy because the goal of this society's

educational system is to offer unlimited vocational opportunity for all citizens. The resources necessary for unlimited vocational opportunity can be obtained by rational state spending priorities in other areas outside education and a ceiling placed upon individual wealth. Wealth would be shared by society; but the ceiling could be kept high enough to provide incentives and a modicum of luxuries; perhaps at five million dollars per person. This is not so high considering that some in our society today are worth billions. What is being proposed here is that no person would be denied any vocational training (referred to here as specific career training) because of a lack of funds, and that the type of basic self-fulfilling education proposed here would enhance one's chances of being prepared for the desired vocational training. This avoids the question of whether much more resources should be spent on the intellectually gifted than the rest of the population.

The ultimate paradox of this sort of utopian society is that it would be difficult for it to protect itself from societies which do not offer real moral education.

My discourse about my maxim may have strayed too far in the direction of social philosophy near the end; but I cannot morally separate education from the social context because there are few who could or would choose to be hermits.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Lectures at Rutgers University in the Summer of 1982 by Prof. James Giarelli.

[2] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Emile or on Education. (Allan Bloom, Trans.) New York: Basic Books, 1979 (1762), p. 39.

[3] Bettelheim, Bruno and Zelan, Karen. On Learning to Read: The Child's Fascination with Meaning. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982. From ch. 2: "Why Children Resent Reading", on p. 34: "Almost completely neglected are the valid reasons that may make a child wish not to read and thus motivate him actively to resist efforts to teach him."